

What is Religion?

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we have any spiritual sense or any great hopes for the future of the nations, we ought to realize that Tennyson's way of letting the ape and tiger die, as expressed in the epithalamium with which he closes his "In Memoriam," is by no means the shortest way. The simpler and the swifter way in modern times, would be that of making room for nature's monks. Some of us may still embrace the doctrine of the great nineteenth century poet, who was all too sensitive to the materialism of his age. Some of us may still feel that the submissive animal within us is yet so strong, that the best things cannot be realities to us. But we ought to remember that the wisest Teacher whom the world has ever known said—"In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

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WHAT IS RELIGION?

THE divergent and contradictory uses of the word religion are due, one feels, not only to the difficulty of comprehending the nature of religion but also to the disposition of those who have written upon the subject to further an ulterior purpose by the definitions they propose. The Evangelical controversialist, for instance, seems bent on excluding by his definition what he calls the superstitions of man, or of sharply distinguishing between the so-called natural religions and revealed religion. The moralist seeks apparently to disparage the reputed influence of religion on conduct, and the thorough-going secularist to put religion in the way of inevitable extinction. When the subject is approached, as at present, with a purely scientific interest, all such purposes of doctrinal and philosophical strategy must of course be relinquished. We cannot concern ourselves, either with the relative superiority of a particular form of religion or even with the fate of religion itself. Our only legitimate purpose is to ascertain and express the truth.

Although there cannot be two opinions with regard to the

motive which ought to prompt an inquiry into the nature of religion, it may be said that, owing to the incompleteness of the sciences dealing with the subject, the time has not yet come when an attempt to formulate a definition of religion should be made, or, indeed, can be made with a fair prospect of success. This is true so far as a final scientific definition of religion is concerned. We must, indeed, await further progress in ethnographical and psychological knowledge before we may hope to condense the quintessence of religion into a final definition. Certainly the present writer has a far less ambitious purpose. The need of a more exact definition of religion than is commonly given is not confined, however, to sociology, ethnology, psychology or the philosophy of religion. The greatest demand is in the field of popular discussion, where the utmost confusion reigns in regard to the question of the stability and permanence of religion, and its relation to science and morality. Now that the church statistics of the census of 1900 are made public, the regular decennial debate upon the question of the growth or the decadence of religious interest will doubtless begin. The slightest improvement on current definitions of religion may therefore prove to be of some immediate popular value.

The first step toward a clear understanding of religion is to distinguish carefully between religion and religions. Religion is the root, the source, the parent of religions. It bears about the same relation to the various religions as a genus to its species. A definition which applies only to one religion is no more a definition of religion than the definition of a particular person is a definition of the *genus homo*. This is so obvious that it is hard to understand why so many definitions are presented which apply to nothing but Christianity. There is no religion which can be absolutely separated from all others, and a definition that is worth anything at all must apply to all forms of religion from the lowest to the highest.

Current definitions of religion, especially those of a theological character, are usually expressed in terms of belief. Occasionally religion is defined in terms of feeling, and sometimes in terms of conduct or conation, but the popular idea is that re-

ligion and belief are identical. The prevalence of this idea is chiefly due to the definitions presented in the writings of a few philosophers and theologians. James Martineau, for instance, defined religion as the "belief in an ever-living God, that is, a Divine mind and will ruling the universe and holding moral relations with mankind;"* Bishop Butler, as the belief in one God or Creator and Moral Governor of the world and in a future state of retribution implying immortality;† and many writers, among whom is the philosopher Immanuel Kant, have made the belief in immortality the sole basis of religion.‡ The demand of the church for belief, and the constant association in the New Testament of belief with salvation, and unbelief with its opposite, encourage popular acceptance of these definitions.

Theology, however, is not the only science which identifies religion with belief. When we turn to those writers who have approached the subject from the ethnographical side we find the same mistaken conception. De Quatrefages Letourneau, Topinard, Sir John Lubbock and Prof. E. B. Tylor, to mention only a few of these writers, all define religion in terms of belief. Even Mr. Herbert Spencer, who calls it "an *a priori* theory of the universe," bases religion upon the intellectual element.§

Now, we may readily admit that knowledge or belief is an element in religion, as a more or less specific belief is an element in all religions; but when we define religion as specific belief,—for instance, the belief in God, in immortality, or in spiritual beings,—we not only recognize an intellectual element in religion but we make religion synonymous with a particular

*"Study of Religion," Vol. 1, p. 1.

†Ward, "Dynamic Sociology," Vol. 2, p. 160.

‡"Kritik der reinen Vernunft," S. 271, cited by Ward in "Dynamic Sociology," Vol. 2, p. 252.

§See Quatrefages, "L'espece Humaine," p. 356; Letourneau, "L'Evolution Religieuse dans les Diverses Races Humaines," p. 4; Topinard, "Science and Faith," p. 246; Sir John Lubbock, "Prehistoric Times," p. 574; Tylor, "Primitive Culture," Vol. 1, p. 424; Spencer, "First Principles," p. 43; also Crozier, "Civilization and Progress," p. 257, where religion is defined as "the philosophy of the masses."

form of belief. This narrows the scope of religion, and in an age of uncompromising criticism, stakes its life upon the accuracy of an intellectual formula. For, considering the present state of knowledge, what formulated belief can be said to be absolutely permanent? None. To base religion upon belief, therefore, is to build the house of religion upon the sand, and when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon it, what assurance can we have that it will not fall?

To say of current definitions of religion, however, that they present it as an unstable and vanishing phenomenon is not necessarily to offer against them a fatal objection. The end or purpose of a definition, like that ascribed by Hamlet to playing, is "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to Nature." If the truth is reflected, that is all we can demand, whatever be the fate of the thing defined. But the quickest way, perhaps, to show that an error is involved in considering religion as a matter of belief is to point out some of the consequences of accepting the common definition. If we accept the definition, for instance, that religion is belief in one all-wise personal Being, we commit ourselves to the view that the great majority of the human race have lived without religion. For nothing is clearer to those who have any familiarity with the religious ideas of mankind than that the belief in many gods has been far more prevalent than the belief in one. Monotheism is a comparatively recent development in the history of religious thought. It is sometimes said, to be sure, that "all human beings have the idea of God,"* but this is a pleasant fiction invented for theological purposes. "There is no evidence," says Darwin, "that man was aboriginally endowed with the ennobling belief in the existence of an Omnipotent God. On the contrary there is ample evidence, derived not from hasty travelers, but from men who have long resided with savages, that numerous races have existed, and still exist, who have no idea of one or more gods, and who have no words in their languages to express such an idea."† Again, Sir John Lubbock, after citing a score or more

**Outlook*, December, 1900, p. 919.

†"Descent of Man" (Humboldt Library), p. 51.

of illustrations to prove the point, says that "those who assert that even the lowest savages believe in a supreme Deity, affirm that which is entirely contrary to the evidence."* This is a different question, of course, from that of the universality of religion, with which we are not at present concerned. All we are now trying to show is that by defining religion as the belief in a Supreme Being we exclude from the category of religious the vast majority of the human race. Not only do primitive religions fall outside of the definition, but also one of the world's great religions, namely Buddhism, which numbers more adherents than any other. Sir Monier Monier-Williams, the learned professor of Sanscrit at Oxford, does indeed declare that Buddhism is not a religion; but this surprising opinion must be due to his desire to be consistent, for he holds that "a religion, in the proper sense of the word, must postulate the existence of one living and true God of infinite power, wisdom and love, the Creator and Designer and Preserver of all things visible and invisible," and that it "must take for granted the immortality of man's soul or spirit." "Christianity," he asserts, "is a religion, whereas Buddhism, at least in its earliest and truest form, is no religion at all."† If Buddhism is not a religion, pray what is it? Of what value is a definition of religion which includes only Christianity? However convenient it may be for controversial purposes, it does not satisfy the requirements of science.

If, instead of the belief in a Supreme Being, we accept the view that belief in immortality is identical with religion, we are confronted by the same difficulty. The idea of an unending future existence "does not belong to the lower forms of religion, but is a comparatively recent extension of the early idea of a future life."‡ Mr. John Fiske in the book entitled "*Through Nature to God*," does indeed assert that "belief in the Unseen world in which human beings continue to exist after death," is an indispensable element of religion, and he

*"Prehistoric Times," p. 579.

†Quoted by Dr. Carus, "Buddhism and its Christian Critics," p. 290.

‡Prof. Lester F. Ward "Dynamic Sociology," Vol. 2, p. 280.

seems to identify this belief with immortality. Dr. Brinton, also, maintains that the mind of primitive man was so filled with visions of universal and immortal life, that to many there was no such thing as death;* but Prof. Tylor, than whom there is no better authority, positively asserts that "far from a life after death being held by all men as the destiny of all men, whole classes are formally excluded from it," and that "even among races who distinctly accept the doctrine of a surviving soul, this acceptance is not unanimous." "The soul," he says, "as recognized in the philosophy of the lower races, may be defined as an ethereal surviving being, conceptions of which preceded and led up to the more transcendental theory of the immaterial and immortal soul, which forms part of the theology of the higher nations."† Passing over the numerous illustrations from primitive life cited by Prof. Tylor, we may mention the Greeks, among whom the idea of immortality was very vague, and call to mind the fact that it is by no means generally accepted among us to-day. What has the conception of immortality to do with the religious philosophy of those who hold with the late Prof. Huxley, that religion is "reverence and love for the ethical ideal, and the desire to realize that ideal in life?‡ Or with that of the followers of Herbart who considered sympathy with the universal dependence of men as the essential natural principle of religion.§

We see, then, that a definition of religion in terms of the higher and derived beliefs is not inclusive. There is involved, however, a more serious consequence.

If religion is identified with a form of belief, the fate of religion is made to depend upon the permanence of that belief. Thus the very existence of religion may seem to be jeopardized, for, as was said before, no belief may be regarded as perfectly secure against the advancing tide of critical thought. Some may reply that the belief in a personal Creator is absolutely

*"Religion of Primitive Peoples," p. 69.

†"Primitive Culture," Vol. 2, pp. 22 and 24.

‡"Christianity and Agnosticism," (Humboldt Library), p. 25.

§"Science of Education," English Translation, p. 171.

permanent. But many of the greatest thinkers have abandoned this conception.*

If the belief in immortality is suggested as one that is unlikely to pass away, we are confronted by the fact that some profound thinkers have ceased to hold it. Prof. Haeckel, for instance, in his recent book on "The Riddle of the Universe," dismisses this dogma as hopelessly inconsistent with the most solid truths of science. When Giordano Bruno, whose love for the truth brought him to the stake three hundred years ago, faced his accusers, he was unsupported by either the belief in a personal deity or the belief in immortality. Must we say, then, that this martyr to the truth was an irreligious man? Such must be our conclusion if we accept the idea that belief in immortality is essential to religion. A writer in the *Contemporary Review* said, some years ago, "If for any reason, mankind does, at any time cease to believe in its own immortality, then religion will also have ceased to exist as a part of the consciousness of humanity."† There is no need, however, for linking the fate of religion to belief in immortality or to any other specific belief.

Whatever religion may be, no unprejudiced student of the subject will contend that it may properly be identified with the higher and derived beliefs, like the belief in a personal God or the belief in immortality. The necessity of some more general conception will at once be recognized. We find, therefore, that the ethnographer, while defining religion as belief, seeks the rudimentary and common form of belief from which all others may be derived, and identifies religion with that belief. We shall see, however, that the lower we descend among beliefs for an inclusive definition of religion, the more precarious the situation of religion becomes.

The broadest definition of religion that has ever been given in terms of belief is that of Prof. Tylor, that is, the belief in

*"Dieu," says De Greef, to quote but a single author, "est un personnage historique, susceptible de naissance, de croissance et de mort, comme les dieux, les fétiches et les esprits en général."—Introduction à la Sociologie, Tome 2, p. 218.

†Rev. T. W. Fowle, quoted by Professor Ward, "Dynamic Sociology," II, 253.

Spiritual Beings. "The first requisite in a systematic study of the religions of the lower races," he says, "is to lay down a rudimentary definition of religion. By requiring in this definition the belief in a Supreme Deity or judgment after death, the adoration of idols or the practice of sacrifice, or other partially diffused doctrines or rites, no doubt many tribes may be excluded from the category of religious. But such narrow definition has the fault of identifying religion rather with particular developments than with the deeper motive which underlies them. It seems best to fall back at once on this essential source, and simply to claim as a minimum definition of religion, the belief in Spiritual Beings." This belief is supposed to be universal. "So far as I can judge from the immense mass of accessible evidence," says Prof. Tylor, "we have to admit that the belief in Spiritual Beings appears among all low races with whom we have attained a thoroughly intimate acquaintance; whereas the assertion of absence of such belief must apply either to ancient tribes or to more or less imperfectly described modern ones."* Prof. Tylor's definition leaves nothing to be desired, then, so far as inclusiveness is concerned. Like other definitions of religion in terms of a specific belief, however, it is fatal to the claim that religion is a permanent reality. To realize the truth of this we have only to consider the evolution of modern religious beliefs.

The study of the evolution of modern religious conceptions teaches plainly that they are the natural outgrowth of the primitive conception of Spiritual Beings. The montheistic conception of to-day, for instance, is logically related to polytheism, and is the result of a gradual integration of the God-conception, as science has progressed toward the idea of a unitary cause. The orthodox theory of inspiration, to use another illustration, is the natural product of the primitive idea of souls and possession. Hence religion, if it means primarily a belief, whether high or low, must stand or fall with the belief in Spiritual Beings. Let us examine the validity of this belief.

The belief in Spiritual Beings is derived from two sources.

*"Primitive Culture," Vol. I, pp. 424, 425.

It is a deduction either from such phenomena as dreams, swoons, apoplexy, shadows, and reflections in water, which were satisfactorily explained to the primitive mind by the assumption of a double self, or a soul and body, normally but not continuously united; or from the phenomena of objective nature,—the thunder, the lightning, wind, rain, the movements of the clouds, etc.,—of which the assumption of invisible beings analogous to men was to the primitive man a sufficient explanation. The genesis of the idea of another self, or soul, capable of entering and leaving the body, which is the subjective basis of the belief in Spiritual Beings, is thus accounted for by Prof. Tylor: "When the sleeper awakens from a dream," (he is speaking of primitive man) "he believes he has somehow been away, or that other people have come to him. As it is well known by experience that men's bodies do not go off on these excursions, the natural explanation is that every man's living self, or soul, is his phantom or image, which can go out of his body and see and be seen itself in dreams. Even waking men in broad daylight sometimes see these human phantoms in what are called visions or hallucinations. They are further led to believe that the soul does not die with the body, but lives on after quitting it, for although a man may be dead and buried, his phantom-figure continues to appear to the survivors in dreams and visions. That men have such unsubstantial images belonging to them is familiar in other ways to the savage philosopher who has watched their reflections in still water of their shadows following them about, fading out of sight to reappear presently somewhere else, while sometimes for a moment he has seen their living breath as a faint cloud, vanishing, though one can feel that it is still there."* From this subjective source Mr. Spencer derives ancestor worship, which he claims is the parent form of all religions.

The second method by which the idea of invisible beings may have been derived is quite as simple. Conscious of himself as a cause, the primitive man would by analogy attribute some form of life to anything that manifested power or movement.

*"Anthropology," pp, 343, 344.

Indeed, it is even now contended that by the very nature of our intelligence we are bound to represent the cause of things in terms of ourselves.* Darwin, in opposition to Mr. Spencer, thought that this personification of the causes of nature preceded the belief in a double.† Here, then, are the two bases which support the belief in Spiritual Beings. Remove these and religion, as defined by Mr. Tylor, falls to the ground.

We have only to consider for a moment the effect of modern science upon these two ideas which support the belief in question, to appreciate the precarious condition of religion when it is regarded as the belief in Spiritual Beings. No modern psychologist, for instance, would accept the idea of a double to explain the phenomena of dreams, swoons, apoplexy, etc., nor does anyone now believe that the forces of nature may properly be interpreted as invisible personal agencies. Prof. Ward in dismissing the idea of the first, or subjective, view of the origin of the belief in question, says, "Does the reflection of a man's face in a pool really indicate that the man possesses two faces, a bodily and a spiritual face? Does the shadow that he casts, or the echo of his voice, really prove that he has an immaterial double? Does a dream or a trance, in which an alibi is proved to the mind of the ignorant savage really demonstrate that his other self exists and has been wandering about, while all his friends declare that his proper self has remained in the same place? Is there any fallacy by which, on this view, the fundamental conception of religion has been arrived at? All will, of course, admit that the premises are utterly false in all these cases. If even the very root of the tree consists wholly of error, is it not reasonable to suppose that the branches and the fruit will partake of the same nature?" And the same writer ends his inquiry in regard to the second or objective view, as follows: "Is the wind really an immaterial spirit? Are the sun, moon and stars actual verities? Is the rainbow a goddess or a bridge connecting earth and heaven, or was it placed in the heavens by a Deity as a covenant between him and man? Are meteors 'excrements of dirty little star gods'?

*See Crozier, "Civilization and Progress," p. 232.

†"Descent of Man," (Humboldt Library), p. 51, footnote.

Or is an eclipse a result of the defecation of the divine orb of day? Does the plant grow, or the tide ebb or flow, or rain descend or the lightning flash, in obedience to spiritual powers above, and outside of nature, having distinct personalities? All these phenomena are now satisfactorily explained on strictly natural principles. Among peoples acquainted with science, all such supernatural beings have been dispensed with, and the belief in them is declared to be false, and to always have been false.”* Thus we see that Prof. Ward rejects the two ideas upon which the belief in Spiritual Beings is based, and it hardly will be denied that both are erroneous, and under the influence of scientific criticism have gradually crumbled away. What then becomes of religion as defined by Mr. Tylor? Obviously it is left without a support. Mr. Spencer does indeed try to save it by his favorite method of finding a “soul of truth in things erroneous.” Like Prof. Ward, he discards both the idea of a double and the idea of invisible personal agencies in nature, but “at the outset,” he says, “a germ of truth was contained in the primitive conception—the truth, namely, that the power that manifests itself in consciousness is but a differently conditioned form of the power that manifests itself beyond consciousness.”† As he does not interpret this power in terms of personality, however, he does not save religion as the belief in Spiritual Beings.

Incidentally we may remark that in the idea that religion is a form of belief we have an explanation of the supposed conflict between science and religion, and of the confidence expressed by some writers in the present decay and final disappearance of religion. Regarding religion as belief, and witnessing the destructive effects of scientific criticism in every department of knowledge, many thinkers have regretfully, or gleefully, acknowledged that religion must decrease as science increases, and that there will come a time when religion will have entirely disappeared. “The progress of religion,” says De Greef, “is in the reduction of religion to an absurdity.”‡

*“Dynamic Sociology,” Vol. 2, pp. 266, 268-9.

†“Principles of Sociology,” Vol. 3, pp. 170-1.

‡“Introduction a la Sociologie,” Tome 2, p. 208.

and a distinguished socialist says, "Religion expires when belief in Supernatural Beings or Supernatural Ruling Powers ceases to exist."* Obviously this is true if the idea of religion entertained by these writers is correct. If, however, they are mistaken it only shows that there is a strategical blunder in defining religion as the belief in Spiritual Beings, or as any other specific belief.

What has been said thus far is not conclusive, of course, in regard to the expediency of setting aside current definitions of religion. As was said before, a true definition of religion is not concerned with the fate of religion, and it is not our purpose to shield religion from criticism or to force it to present an aspect of permanence. The only legitimate purpose of a definition is accurately to mark off the thing defined from every other phenomenon. We must try, therefore, to find a more valid objection than those to which we have already referred.

In the preceding discussion we have shown that we must look beyond all specific forms of religious belief, and *a fortiori* beyond all forms of religion to find religion itself. It does not follow, however, that we can eliminate from religion the element of belief. A religion is in one aspect a complex of beliefs. Buddhism, Christianity, or any organized form of religion, hinges on a system of beliefs, a body of doctrine. But if we proceed downward through any of the various religions until we come to the common and simplest form of belief out of which all others have sprung, we shall have, not religion itself but always a manifestation and consequence of religion. In this aspect there is no difference between the crude belief of the savage and the highest religious conception of modern Christianity. Both are alike manifestations of religion. Now, below the lowest and simplest form of religious belief, that is, the belief in Spiritual Beings, and giving rise to it, there must be a vague recognition or perception of a power or powers which the primitive man regards as outside of himself and responsible for certain puzzling phenomena. "There is one fact," says Prof. Ward, "which all races and peoples, however

*Bebel, "Woman, Past, Present and Future," p. 178. For a similar opinion, see also Loria, "Economic Foundations of Society," p. 24.

primitive, and all mankind, however enlightened, have universally recognized. This fact is that there is a power outside of themselves which is beyond their control. Rude peoples, living as they always do, in direct contact with nature, are constantly brought into relationship with this power and made to feel much more strongly than do civilized races their complete subjection to it." To the primitive man, therefore, the world is full of mysteries. He perceives that there is something beyond himself which acts as a cause. He believes, therefore, in the existence of a powerful and mysterious *something*. What this something is he knows not, but that is one of the first questions for which he sought an answer. The earliest philosopher provided him with a theory, and that theory was the existence of invisible, humanlike agencies. This interpretation, however, was not religion but philosophy. Religion was the antecedent phenomenon. Thus, man was religious prior to the formulation of a specific belief in Spiritual Beings. He recognized vaguely and indefinitely a mysterious power in nature before any definite theory was formulated concerning it.

Beyond this vague recognition or perception of a mysterious power in the world, it is impossible to trace religious belief. The element of belief, or perception, then, is at the beginning of religion, as a specific belief in Spiritual Beings is at the beginning of theology. The final element in an analysis of religious beliefs, whether of the individual or of the race, is a perception in the individual consciousness of an unknown power or powers operating in nature.

Are those writers correct, then, who define religion, not as a specific belief, but as a mere perception of the Infinite, or the "perception of man's relation to the principles of the universe"?* We do not think so. Perception is not the only element in religion. Let us proceed to inquire what other elements are revealed by an analysis of religion.

It will generally be admitted, perhaps, that the very word

*Among those who have defined religion as perception are Max Müller and Jevons. Shelley, in his notes to "Queen Mab," defined it as "perception of the relation in which we stand to the principle of the universe."

religion implies restraint upon conduct, and the direction of individual activities. A religious man must be to some extent guided by his religion. He must needs have "scruples." This is illustrated in all religions, from the primitive forms which induce sacrifices and obedience to the will of the gods, to Christianity, which authoritatively declares, for instance, that "If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridled not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain."* And it is illustrated as well in the individual, for who could properly be called religious who does not act to some extent in accordance with the principles of his religion? Prof. Lester F. Ward, in a profound article on the "Essential Nature of Religion,"† and Mr. Henry Rutgers Marshall, in his book on "Instinct and Reason," which is mainly devoted to religion, bring out with great clearness and power this feature of religion and pronounce it its characteristic element.

Prof. Ward's thesis is that "religion is a substitute in the rational world for instinct in the subrational world." "Instinct," he says, "may be looked upon as a device of nature to make the organism desire to perform acts that subserve function, but which would not otherwise be desired." So religion is a device to restrain the individual from activities harmful to the race and to direct him to the performance of safe ones. In tracing the development of organisms from the lowest forms to man, he finds that there have been, at least, three critical periods when the existence of organisms was threatened. "The first of these was when plastic organisms were created, endowed with locomotion, and dependent for subsistence upon organic matter, the condition to the existence of which was feeling This was the origin of mind. The second ordeal was when the will had so strongly asserted itself that existence was put in jeopardy. This was remedied by the development of instincts. Passing over minor ones, we come at last to an ordeal still more severe than any of the previous ones. In the natural upward march of the psychic faculty feeling became at length so potent and its demands so impera-

*Jas. I: 26.

†INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS, January, 1898.

tive that the direct efforts hitherto employed in its satisfaction no longer sufficed, and a new device was gradually elaborated that should secure the ends of the creature with far greater success. This was the 'indirect method of conation,' and to the affective faculty was now added the perceptive faculty. The intellect was developed as an aid to the will But with this immense gain from the standpoint of the individual almost immediately commenced a destruction of the race of beings to which this faculty had been committed. It was now easy to secure the satisfaction of desire, and desires had grown so manifold and so vehement, and a larger and larger proportion of them not being adapted to function, many, indeed being directly opposed to it, that obviously, if, under this new dispensation, everything were allowed to go on without restraint, the race of rational beings must quickly run its course and come to naught. Fortunately, however, this very perceptive faculty which was being so freely employed in the interest of feeling regardless of function, was also capable of dimly and intuitively perceiving the dangers to which it was leading. Along with the individual mind working thus egoistically for the individual end, keenly pointing out the ways in which pain could be thwarted and pleasure assured, there was also working broadly, deeply, and sub-consciously, what may properly be called a collective or social mind, solemnly warning against the dangers and authoritatively inhibiting all race-destroying actions. A new device, analogous in many respects to instinct on the lower plane, was gradually developed and perfected *pari passu* with the reason on the higher plane. This device was *religion*."

This profound analysis is correct as far as it goes, but it will be observed, that Prof. Ward is chiefly concerned with the social function of religion, and describes its genesis as a social instrument for restraining individual action. Our investigation carries us back one step further and inquires into the origin of religion as it manifests itself in the individual, and which by and by is laid hold of by the social group as a means of restraining its members.

What has just been said of Prof. Ward's article applies also

to the treatment of religion in Mr. Marshall's book. After a long but inconclusive argument to show that religion is instinctive, he concludes by defining religion as a suppression of our fallible wills to what we conceive of as a higher will. "Under my view," he says, "what is here called the suppression of our will to the higher will, may be expressed in psychological terms as the restraint of the individualistic impulses to racial ones; that such restraint has effect upon the moral character being, of course, granted. This restraint seems to me to be of the very essence of religion. The belief in the Deity, as usually found being from the psychological view an attachment to, rather than of the essence of, the religious feeling; and this, whether as metaphysicians we may or may not be compelled to the belief in this Absolute Deity."* In another passage he speaks of this restraint as "the very core and essence of religious functioning."

Undoubtedly both Prof. Ward and Mr. Marshall are correct in assigning to religion the element of restraint, or, viewed positively, a directive power in human action; but in the final analysis this element is merely restraint and not social restraint. Social restraint does not appear until the social group, or its leader, becomes conscious of the value of religion as an instrument of restraint and a means of securing from the individual socially beneficial activities. It is, therefore, highly probable from the available evidence that religion arose not as a social, but as a psychological necessity. As a spontaneous variation in the character of the individual it may not have been an advantage to him, but the incipient social mind soon perceived its possibilities as a social instrument and preserved it as such. If the primitive individual, thrown into an environment of manifestations of a mysterious power, perceives the existence of such a power, and realizes his dependence upon it, and strives to propitiate it, he becomes religious whether the activities following from his religion are socially beneficial or not. Probably many individuals and many groups were extinguished by their undirected religious activities before a consciousness of the social value of religion arose. Natural selection of indi-

*"Instinct and Reason," p. 329.

viduals and of social groups would alone in time adapt religious functioning to social survival. But it is doubtless true, as Prof. Ward suggests, that religion as a social phenomenon was the product of both natural selection and reason. The point to be noticed here, however, is that the origin of religion is independent of its social value. Its appearance in the world is an individual phenomenon; its persistence, a social one.

Religion, then, cannot be correctly defined as a particular form of restraint, any more than it can be correctly defined as a particular form of belief. It is not "being good and doing good," as Dr. Chalmers asserted, nor "loving obedience to God's commandments," as Dr. Deems used to say, nor "morality touched with emotion," as Matthew Arnold defined it. Religion and morality are two genetically distinct phenomena. "Religion," says Mr. John Fiske, "views the individual in his relations to the Infinite Power manifested in a universe of casually connected phenomena, as Morality views him in his relation to his fellow-creatures."* Prof. Tylor tells us that "The relation of morality to religion is one that only belongs in its rudiments, or not at all, to rudimentary civilization." And again he says, "One great element of religion, the moral element, which among the higher nations forms its most vital part, is indeed little represented in the religion of the lower races."† And Mr. J. Deniker in his "Races of Man," (p. 220) declares that "Animistic religion is destitute of a moral element, which many persons consider inseparable from religion."‡ Morality implies not merely restraint, but social and conventional restraint, and may be based upon public opinion and social conventions as well as upon religious beliefs. As Mr. John Fiske somewhere says, the reason why religion and moral-

*Cosmic Philosophy," Vol. 2, p. 357.

†"Primitive Culture, Vol. 2, pp. 326-427.

‡The separate origin of religion and morality is, of course, not generally admitted. Pfeiderer, for instance, denies that they stood originally in no connection with each other. "It is an incontrovertible fact," he says, "that the primitive morality stands in very close connection with the primitive religion."—"Philosophy and Development of Religion," Vol. 1, Chap. 2. On a question of this kind, however, the opinion of an ethnographer is more valuable than that of a theologian.

ity are so often identified is that in the higher religions they are practically co-extensive. We are thus brought to the conclusion that a definition of religion in terms of a special form of action or conduct is as erroneous as a definition in terms of belief, and yet we must admit that action like belief is an element in religion.

Wherever an individual or racial phenomenon is manifested in belief or action, there is always present also another element, namely, feeling. It is not strange, then, that the religious feeling, or the feeling of impotence which the human mind experiences before the forces of nature, and out of which all religious idea, however elaborate or complex, are derived, has been fixed upon by some writers as the essence of, or the essential element in religion. Schleiermacher's definition of religion as "a feeling of absolute dependence" at once comes to mind. Mr. John Fiske declares that the feeling of dependence is the essential element in the theistic idea;* and Prof. Ward says, "It is this sense of helplessness before the majesty of the environment, which if it is not religion itself is the foundation upon which all religion is built."† But even those who define religion in terms of feeling do not pretend that a mere feeling is sufficient to constitute religion. Neither Schleiermacher nor Pfleiderer, who emphasize this element, contend that religion is identical with feeling. In every religious act, says the latter philosopher, the whole personality is present. Why then should we define religion in terms of feeling, when feeling, like belief and action, is merely an element in religion?

The result of our discussion thus far may be summed up in the following proposition: Religion manifests itself in belief, feeling and action, and these three elements are present whether we consider it ethnographically as a social device or psychologically as a phenomenon of the individual consciousness. A correct definition of religion must then depend upon the relation and relative importance of these three elements.

Now the relation in the individual consciousness, and the relative importance of perception, feeling and the conative im-

*"The Idea of God," p. 62.

†INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS, January, 1898.

pulse, are questions of psychology. It is to this science, and not to theology or ethnology, therefore, that we must look for a final definition of religion. The final word, however, on the nature of consciousness has not been said. But there seems to be a consensus of opinion among the later psychologists on one point, namely, that it is impossible to break up the individual consciousness into the two or three wholly separate processes of knowing, feeling and willing. "The psychic life," says Ribot, "is a continuity beginning with sensation and ending with movement,"* and this assertion is the working hypothesis and keynote of the new psychology. From sensation to perception, perception to the higher phases of knowledge, and knowledge to action there is no break, and feeling is an inevitable accompaniment of all. If this is true, if it is true that the religious consciousness is a unity embracing knowledge, feeling and the tendency to act, it does not seem that we ought to identify religion with any one of these mental phenomena. "To speak of any whole manifestation of life," says Prof. Leuba, "as being in its 'essential' nature intellectual or affective or volitional, is to misconstrue the facts, for, although it is admitted that any expression of conscious life can be analyzed into its successive moments (sensation, reflective ideation, desires, impulses, will's determination, etc.,) and that one or the other of these constituents can be at times preponderantly present to the subject's consciousness, it does by no means follow that that particular pulse of life is an idea, or a volition, or a feeling, or that one or the other of these part-processes can properly be looked upon as the essential nature of the whole. A time sequence may exist, and as a matter of fact, does exist: volition follows upon sensation and ideation. But this fact does not constitute volition the essence of psychic life."†

Psychology thus seems to estop us from identifying religion with the perceptive, the affective or the conative element, and to demand a form of definition which will include them all. Such a demand may be met, perhaps, by defining religion in

*"German Psychology of To-day," p. 7.

†"Introduction to a Psychological Study of Religion," *The Monist*, January, 1901.

terms of desire. Desire plainly implies both perception and feeling, and where these are present, action follows, for all mental states produce bodily activity of some sort. If it is considered that there might be a religious desire the influence of which would fall short of producing what is usually regarded as religious activity, the defect may possibly be remedied by the use of the word effective. A desire which produces religious activity may be called an effective desire. Religion, then, may be defined in terms of effective desire. But desire for what?

We have, already, referred to the universal perception of a power not ourselves, which perception lies at the basis of all specific religious beliefs. This power is the objective factor in religion.

The conscious recognition of this objective factor, the feeling of dependence upon it and the resultant activity are the indispensable elements of religion. What this objective factor or power is called is not of primary importance. That is a matter of intellectual interpretation. To the primitive man it is ghosts, to the modern theologian it is a personal God, and to the evolutionary philosopher it is "an Infinite and Eternal Energy." All philosophy from the crude explanations of the savage to the profoundest *Welt-anschauung* of the modern *savant* is but a series of partial interpretations, and no one can say what the final world-conception or God-idea will be. A definition of religion, therefore, should offer no interpretation of this universal power.

Given the perception of a power manifesting itself in the world, and a feeling of dependence upon it, an inevitable result will be the desire of the individual to be in right or personally advantageous relations to that power. Conscious religious activity is always in obedience to this desire. What is sacrifice, fasting, prayer, and all the other forms of propitiation, but the effort of men to put themselves in right relation to the power which they apprehend, but do not comprehend? The desire of religion, therefore, is a desire for rightness, for adjustment to the universal order, for harmonious relations with a power objectively conceived.

We may suggest, then, as a tentative definition of religion, the following: *Religion is the effective desire to be in right relations to the power manifesting itself in the universe.*

While this definition of religion is not put forward as final, the writer making no pretensions to expert psychological knowledge, it may be affirmed that no narrower definition will include all manifestations of religious life.

If the definition here given is approximately correct, it may be observed that, while it is not framed for that purpose, it is of tactical advantage to those who argue that religion is a permanent reality. For, in the first place, religion is at once removed from all danger of science. Science may attack and destroy particular forms of belief, but religion is unassailable. It is conceivable that the scythe of scientific criticism, as it sweeps over the field of religious thought, may cut down all modern theological conceptions, but the roots of religion, embedded in the soil of man's nature, will not be touched, and soon new beliefs will spring up to take the place of the old. Science can no more destroy religion than it can destroy love. Nothing can affect religion but a demonstration that no mysterious power in the world exists, and there need be no fear of that. Under this interpretation it is eminently true that only the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

In the second place, it is clear that if religion may be correctly defined in terms of desire, more people are religious than are usually so regarded. It sounds paradoxical to speak of a religious agnostic, or a religious atheist. And yet, a man who recognizes, and desires to be in right relations to, "an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed," without claiming to know the ultimate nature of that energy, is religious; and as atheism, as usually understood, is merely the denial of a particular interpretation of this energy, it is not inconsistent with religion. The Buddhist, for instance, is a religious atheist.

It does not follow from our definition of religion, however, that *all* men are religious. It is conceivable that the recognition of a mysterious power in the world, apparently outside of ourselves, may not be followed by an effective desire to be in

right relations with that power. Probably at every stage of belief there have been those who have maintained toward what they themselves believed to be the source of supreme authority an attitude of indifference or defiance. Such an attitude, however, is surely the exception and not the rule. Unwillingness to accept the beliefs of an age may be an indication of superior intelligence, but the same cannot be said of an irreligious nature. Classic literature furnishes us an impressive picture of Ajax defying the lightning, but it is not written that for this procedure Ajax exalted his reputation for common-sense.

Finally, if religion has been correctly defined, it is not something that has been revealed to one people and withheld from another. It springs up naturally as an element in the nature of man. It is not dependent upon the accuracy of his thought. It appears in the dawn of intelligence in the savage, who sees God in the clouds and hears him in the wind, and manifests itself in every age and amongst every people,—in the philosopher who seeks to harmonize his life with what he regards as the eternal and unchanging principle of the universe, as well as in the saint, who looks upon the Lord as a very present help in time of trouble. Science is its handmaid, winnowing the chaff from the beliefs it has produced. The present demand is for recognition of the stability of religion, and the fearless and unsparing criticism of prevailing theological conceptions.

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